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ABSTRACT

Ninety-six percent of the students who enter first grade in the San Juan School District, Blanding, Utah, cannot speak or understand English. They are Navaho and attend school on the Navaho reservation. A unique bilingual Navaho curriculum project has been developed to provide learning materials in the Navaho language to enable the child to learn when he first enters school, regardless of the language he speaks. Using film-strips, cassette recordings, slides, 16 mm films, book illustrations, and the printed word, the project translates the learning materials found in the classroom into the Navaho language. Major objectives of the San Juan Educational Program are to provide instruction in the language the child understands best so that he does not become retarded in the academic areas while learning the common instructional language; build a positive self image of all children; and develop closer communication and understanding between parents and teachers. Evaluation shows that the Navaho children in the program have improved in their reading and in their attitudes toward school. (Author/DE)

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A BILINGUAL NAVAJO CURRICULUM PROJECT

Ninety-six percent of the students who enter the first grade in the San Juan School District, Blanding, Utah, cannot speak or understand English. They are Navajo, and they attend the Bluff, Montezuma, and Mexican Hat elementary schools on the Navajo reservation. "We can't wait until our children learn English before beginning their education," comments Kent Tibbitts. "We don't care what language they learn in, as long as they learn."

Tibbitts is the Media Specialist for a unique curriculum project, which develops learning materials in the Navajo language. Using film-strips, cassette recordings, slides, 16 mm films, book illustrations, and the printed word, the project translates the learning materials found in the classroom into the Navajo language.

The curriculum project is truly a community operation. The materials are developed for elementary students. High school students collect stories, translate them, draw cartoons, and make recordings. A parent advisory group suggests topics for stories and classroom materials and reviews the materials before they are put into the classroom. And community members relate folk tales to the students and advise on the proper use of the Navajo language. So the efforts and needs of many people are combined at the Indian Educational Center, and all of the members of the community are learning from each other.

HOW THE CENTER IS ORGANIZED

The Indian Educational Center serves 1200 Native Americans--700 in kindergarten through grade 6; 150 in grades 7 and 8; 150 in grades 9 through 12; and 200 adults. Elementary-age Navajo children attend school on the reservation. The high school students attend Blanding High School, which is approximately 50% Anglo and 50% Indian. In addition to Tibbitts, the Center's staff includes Don Mose, Media Specialist, and Mary Toledo, Media Assistant. They work closely with the Parent Advisory Committee, which is made up of both Navajo and Anglo parents It was this committee that originally recommended that the program be established. Members suggest topics and review the materials at various stages of production. The parents who serve on the committee are elected and represent all geographic areas within the school district.

The high school students who work with the project have a variety of duties. They write stories, interview older citizens, do the art work for animated cartoons, and make recordings. Some of the students are paid, and some are volunteers. Funding for the students who receive pay comes from the Neighborhood Youth Corps, a federally-funded job program for high school students.

In addition to the Parent Advisory Committee, other members of the community also participate. One important function they serve is in helping students to decide the proper way to translate English into Navajo. When the project first began, a Navajo Medicine Man came to the project and told them the "Coyote Tales." This was a great honor, as people usually go the Medicine Man, rather than him coming to them.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of the San Juan Bilingual Education Program are:

1. To provide instruction in all subject matter areas in the language the child understands best so that he does not become retarded in academic areas while learning the common instructional language;
2. To build a positive self image of all children enrolled in project schools; and
3. To develop closer communication and mutual understanding between parents and teachers--particularly where parents and teachers are of different cultures.

It is important for the reader to understand that the project directors do not necessarily feel Navajo children must be able to read and write Navajo. There are few books written in Navajo and even *The Navajo Times*, the official tribal newspaper, is written in English. The important reason for developing bilingual materials is so the child will be able to learn when he first enters school, regardless of the language he speaks. In writing a description of the program, Ruel A. Allred and Vermont C. Harward, who wrote the original program proposal, state

"In the bilingual approach the child is taught in a language he understands. A part of the curriculum is designed to teach him to communicate in the language which he does not yet understand so that in time teaching can take place in either language. It is not a case of 'either/or' but of 'both/and.'"

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE NAVAJO LANGUAGE

"Very simply, we take materials now in the classroom and develop cassette tapes in the Navajo language. And there are some interesting problems in doing this," Tibbitts notes. For example, there is no baby talk in Navajo. So the project staff had to be very careful in translating words and sounds from elementary materials. Also, Navajo children are not accustomed to the sounds of the city. Most commercial materials prepared for minority children are almost without exception based on ghetto or urban life experiences. Navajo children not only don't understand the experiences--the sounds themselves are alien. Loud bangs, crashes, whistles, pops, and other noises do not appeal to the Navajo child. The sounds he is accustomed to hearing are the wind, the rain, the river, or the crackling of a fire.

Another problem is in correctly pronouncing the Navajo language and finding the correct interpretation of English words which do not have a Navajo counterpart. The students and project staff frequently call on the Medicine Man and other tribal elders to help with the proper way to pronounce a word or with the selection of the proper word to use.

CURRICULUM MATERIALS

In the past two years, the project has developed several kinds of curriculum materials which differ in both format and content. The original idea was to write stories and have them printed in both English and Navajo. "First of all," Tibbitts comments, "we had only two people in the district who could both read and write Navajo. And the disagreement about how to present the language in written form was also a problem. So we turned to cassettes."

One product now available is fairy tales such as, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and the *Three Little Pigs*, which have been translated and recorded on cassette tapes by the Navajo high school students. The teachers use commercial filmstrips to accompany the tapes.

Other materials are called "experience stories." These are stories which are written by Navajo high school students, based either on the students' personal experiences or on interviews with tribal members. "The experience stories are a very important tool in helping the Navajo children establish communication with their Anglo teachers," notes Tibbitts. The children read or listen to a story and then tell the teacher of a similar experience which has happened to them or which they have heard about. In this way, children begin to communicate, and the teacher can build up a reservoir of ideas and information when children relate stories to them.

The experience stories are recorded in Navajo and in English. The books containing the stories are written in English and are illustrated by the high school students from the Neighborhood Youth Corps. Final editing is done by the high school teachers, and publication is handled by the project staff. There are currently 25 experience stories on tape and four published in book form.

A third product developed by the project--which is very popular with both the children and adults of the community--includes the the animate films of the Coyote Tales. For many generations, these stories of the "Sad Sack" of the Navajo culture, Trotting Coyote, have been handed down from elders to youngsters. The tales portray patterns of acceptable behavior and morality in the Navajo culture. When the project began, the stories had never been written down, so Don Mose, accompanied by high school students, went into the community and compiled the stories by interviewing tribal elders. The students set to work designing a caricature for Trotting Coyote and the other animal characters appearing in the stories. They showed their designs to members of the community, who helped them decide which figures should appear in the final product.

The U.S. Office of Education recommended that Computer Image of Denver, Colorado, work with the project to animate the drawings, using a computer. After the films are animated, they are produced on 16 mm film and the Medicine Man or another Navajo adult records the sound. There are currently two Coyote films available. Tibbitts notes that these stories are basic among most Indian tribes. Computer Image can change the language on the soundtrack for approximately $500, so the Coyote Legend films can be passed from tribe to tribe.

The Center is also working on a visual perception project. This project develops visual illustrations related to the Navajo culture for use in the kindergarten and first-grade program. One lesson helps little children understand the concept of position in space by using illustrations of a hunting knife.

There are all sorts of other materials which the project has produced. The staff wrote to NASA for original slides of moonwalks, added sound in Navajo language, and wound up with a valuable slide-tape presentation for use in their science program. Other materials have also been developed to help students learn math and health.

NAVAJO EDUCATION BY NAVAJOS

As Tibbitts vividly points out, "The people here represent the strengths of the program." Unlike many educational projects in which professionals develop and judge curriculum materials, the Navajo project provides the necessary tech-

Kent Tibbitts and Don Mose, Jr. assist Dave Harvey of Computer Image in making a sound track for a 16mm fil

Mary Toledo, Audio Consultant, dubs an Indian sto onto cassettes.

Navajo students can continue their work independen while the teacher works with other students.

High school students Allen Holly and Emerson Nakai draw a story board while listening to a Navajo medicine man.

Don Mose points out models of Trotting Coyote for use in the computer animated films.

Students listen to a cassette recording of The Color Kittens while looking at the book.

nical assistance to students and community members so they can develop their own materials and present the Navajo culture in a meaningful and exciting way.

There are many examples of community involvement and support. Liaison workers have been organized to operate as "truant officers in reverse." These workers are assigned to each school to work with the principal, teachers, and parents to help solve problems which might arise. Working from a positive point-of-view, they take work the students have done in the classroom out for the parents to see. They also help look for community members who would like to tell a Coyote Tale or relate an experience story. Their emphasis is to bring more community residents into the schools by taking information about the schools out to the community.

The project has also made extensive use of the Career Opportunities Program (COP) which is operated in conjunction with Brigham Young University. "Classroom teachers must be certified," notes Tibbitts. It is difficult to find Navajos who are certified teachers, so Anglo teachers are hired and assisted by Navajos. The COP program has enabled the Navajo assistants to gain credits and work toward certification while serving in the classroom. There are currently 40 participants in this program.

And of course, as pointed out before, the tribal elders play a very important part by telling stories, helping with translations and proper use of the Navajo language, and making recordings for the project.

IS IT WORKING?

The school district's Bilingual Education Program employs both a full-time project evaluator and an auditor. These people have evaluated the media project. After the first two years of the project, they found that: "On a reading readiness program prepared commercially in English, 66% of the children scored 50 percent or lower on the number of correct responses. Yet, on the Navajo language version, the children were able to score consistently better. Eighty-four percent of the children scored 50% or higher, and almost half of the children obtained scores of 80% or higher."

The evaluators also noted a change in classroom attitudes, with students expressing a more positive attitude toward school. Although rather unorthodox as an evaluative masure, Tibbitts relates an "experience story" which to him indicates the success of the program. "We had some recorded books stored in the Mexican Hat School during Christmas vacation. Someone broke into the storage room and stole a cassette player, all of the cassettes, and books. Three cases of soda pop and a whole box of candy bars sat there for the entire vacation with the window broken. We didn't lose one candy bar, but we did lose all our tapes and cassettes. We knew we were on the right track."

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Media and Technology at Stanford University recently chose the project as one of the top ten media education programs in the United States. Tibbitts and Mose participated in a conference on media and technology conducted in New Orleans by the Clearinghouse. There they exchanged ideas with representatives from the other nine programs and returned home with additional ideas for improving their own project.

SPREADING THE WORD

The San Juan School District newspaper, *Speaking of Progress*, is disseminated among parents and members of the community. It features articles about the project as well as other newsworthy items about school happenings. Copies of the paper are available upon request. The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Media and Technology at Stanford has also published a pamphlet describing the project.

The project staff has conducted over 20 workshops with other schools. They have also made formal presentations to conferences on Indian education, bilingual education, and educational innovations. The curriculum staff has also made TV documentaries describing the program. These documentaries have been shown on stations in a six-state area.

But of course the most important part of the dissemination program is that done in the Navajo community in and around Blanding through the work of the Parent Advisory Committee.

CAN OTHERS DO IT?

The Navajo Curriculum Project, which currently is funded for $26,000 per year with Federal Title VII (Bilingual Education) money, might never have gotten off the ground without this outside push. However, Tibbitts and the other project staff members state: "With the exception of computer animated filming, most school districts probably now possess the equipment to do what we are doing. You need cameras, tape recorders, and duplicators, and lots of willing people." In addition, many school districts now have media specialists as part of their personnel. Therefore, much of the equipment, supplies, and personnel necessary to implement such a project may already be available in other districts. Tibbitts urges other districts with similar needs to closely investigate the program for possible adaptation.

THE FUTURE

While the specific purpose of the program is to provide a service to all schools within the Navajo nation, the project staff hopes that other Indian nations can eventually make use of the materials by substituting their own language on the sound tracks of the movies and slide tapes. "Our project is committed to making materials available at cost to any school that has Indian children." Sometime in the future, Tibbitts also hopes to be able to give assistance to the other nations

which might be interested in developing materials.

Future plans for the Navajo nation call for the development of an oral history of the Navajos of the Utah area. The University of Southern California will assist in the project. Through interviews with Navajos on the reservation, the project will involve students and community in the production of curriculum materials suitable for use in junior and senior high classrooms. The media used to present the history will be "whatever will do the job best."

ERIC DOCUMENTS

ED 067 172 - The Change in Self-Image of Ogalala Sioux Ninth Grade Students Through the Development and Testing of an Indian Culture Curriculum. Final Report. MF - $.65, HC - $3.29. Ninth-grade students study the history and culture of the Ogalala Sioux through interviews with their elders, available reading materials, and photographs.

ED 070 310 - Bibliography of Nonprint Instructional Materials on the American Indian - Available from Brigham Young University Priority Service, Provo, Utah 84601 - $2.95. Contains references to approximately 1400 nonprint instructional materials on the American Indian.

ED 071 785 - The Zunis: Self-Portrayals - Available from The University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106 - $7.95 hardbound, $3.95 paperbound. Oral history of Zuni people recorded by major Zuni storytellers.

ED 074 005 - Bibliography of Resources on the American Indian for Students and Teachers in the Elementary School. MF - $.65, HC - $3.29. This bibliography contains resources on Indians of North and South America and covers topics such as biography, myths and legends, poetry, languages, arts, crafts, music, fiction, religion, and foods.

For further information

WRITE:

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READ:

The Foxfire Book: hog dressing, log cabin building, mountain crafts and foods, planting by the signs, snake lore, hunting tales, faith healing, moonshining, and other affairs of plain living. Edited by Eliot Wigginton. Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972. *The Foxfire Book* is a collection of interviews with people in the community of Rabun Gap-Nacoochee, Georgia. Deep in the Appalachian mountains, Eliot Wigginton's ninth- and tenth-grade students interviewed the people of the community and recorded the tales of arts, crafts, and "other affairs of plain living." The book is another unique example of students seeking information from elders to provide a source of learning.

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